



SHAPING THE FUTURE OF THE REGISTERED ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH SPECIALIST PROGRAM

STRATEGIC PLAN

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Shaping the Future of the Registered Environmental Health Specialist Program

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Executive Summary

In an editorial published in the September-October 1945 issue of *The Sanitarian*, Roscoe Davis, Sanitary Inspector with the California State Department of Public Health, proclaimed that June 15, 1945 was a “RED LETTER DAY” for Sanitarians in California. For at 3:00 p.m. on that date Governor Earl Warren signed into law Senate Bill 319 which provided for the registration of existing sanitarians and the future examination and registration of sanitarians employed full time in State and local departments of health in the State of California. During the bill signing Governor Warren stated that he was proud to sign such progressive legislation for public health. Since that time this dedicated group of individuals have clearly demonstrated that environmental health is the backbone of public health.

What is a REHS? Formerly known as a Registered Sanitarian (RS), a Registered Environmental Health Specialist (REHS) works to improve the quality of life and health through environmental education, consultation, protection, and enforcement. Although many REHSs work for government, many are also employed by the private sector. Some typical program responsibilities include: food protection, drinking water quality, land use, recreational swimming areas, housing, vector control, disaster sanitation, and solid, liquid, medical, and hazardous waste management. The REHS Program is responsible for assuring that persons working in the profession meet the minimum educational, training, and experience requirements as stated in the California Health and Safety Code Sections 106600-106735.

Since the Registration Act was passed, much has changed in California. The field of environmental health has expanded over the last 58 years to cover many new responsibilities such as indoor air quality, bioterrorism preparedness, beach safety, stormwater management, childhood lead poisoning, and toxic chemical management. Nationwide there is movement to strengthen environmental health services. On July 31, 2002, the federal Centers for Disease Control (CDC) released a strategy to revitalize environmental health in the United States. The overarching goal of the CDC plan is to enhance and revitalize the system of environmental health services in order to address the broad range of issues facing states and communities. At present California and the rest of the nation is facing a severe economic downturn. This has caused a difficult problem for State and local governments, as revenues are not adequate to meet proposed expenditures. This problem is expected to last for several years. With the changes in environmental health, national interest, and current fiscal issues, it is time to chart a new course for the future of the REHS program. With the help of the stakeholders the Department has prepared this strategic plan.

In the fall of 2000 a survey was sent to all REHSs asking for both objective and subjective perceptions about the REHS Program specifically and the field of environmental health in general. After the results of the survey were compiled, a series of workshops composed of stakeholder representatives was convened to identify the major issues that would form the

framework of the strategic plan. Prior to final publication the draft strategic plan was shared at a forum for REHSs where additional input was solicited.

Five strategic initiatives were identified and form the framework of this plan. These include:

1. Education: Develop educational strategies for environmental health protection.
2. Recruitment: Develop effective recruitment approaches for the environmental health profession.
3. Public Relations: Develop a public relations approach to environmental health protection.
4. REHS Program Administration: Develop administration programs for environmental health enhancement.
5. Professional Outreach: Develop forums and linkages with various organizations and agencies to promote awareness of environmental health protection.

No single area or initiative is the answer. We believe that action and support are essential at many levels by several organizations. This plan and its initiatives will serve as a portal of action by the Department of Health Services, California Environmental Health Association, California Conference of Directors of Environmental Health, California Conference of Local Health Officers, California Environmental Protection Agency, Registered Environmental Health Specialists, universities, private industry, and other interested parties.

MISSION STATEMENTS:

California Department of Health Services

The mission of the California Department of Health Services is to protect and improve the health of all Californians.

Registered Environmental Health Specialist Program

The mission of the Registered Environmental Health Specialist Program is to safeguard life, health, property, and public welfare by regulating the practice of Registered Environmental Health Specialists.

Overview

The Registered Environmental Health Specialist (REHS) Program is administered under the California Department of Health Services, Division of Drinking Water and Environmental Management. It is mandated by the Environmental Health Specialist Registration Act, California Health and Safety Code (HSC) Sections 106600-106735. The program serves to ensure that individuals who are REHSs have met prescribed education, training, and experience requirements and have passed a comprehensive examination reflective of the demands encountered within the environmental health profession.

HSC Section 106615(e) describes the scope of practice in environmental health as the practice of environmental health by REHSs in the public and private sector. Duties of REHSs include organization, management, education, enforcement, consultation, and emergency response in order to prevent environmental health hazards and to promote and protect the public health and the environment. REHSs are trained in the following areas:

- food protection
- drinking water quality
- water sanitation
- solid waste
- liquid waste
- medical waste management
- onsite septic systems
- housing
- institutional environmental health
- land use
- recreational swimming areas and waters
- hazardous materials management
- underground storage tank control
- emergency preparedness
- community noise control
- electromagnetic radiation control
- milk and dairy sanitation

In general a REHS works to improve the quality of life and health through environmental education, consultation, protection and enforcement. Typical activities of a REHS in local government include inspections of food establishments, recreational swimming areas, community drinking water systems, landfills, hospitals, schools, housing, onsite septic systems, underground storage tanks, hazardous waste generators, and other regulated facilities in order to determine compliance with federal, state, and local statutes, regulations, and ordinances.

The Strategic Planning Process

The Purpose of This Plan

The Registered Environmental Health Specialist (REHS) Program Strategic Plan has been developed to provide a basis for long-range planning for the program. It is intended to complement the California Department of Health Services Strategic Plan published in March 2002.

Input has been solicited from all of the stakeholders of the REHS Program including all REHSs, California Environmental Health Association (CEHA), California Conference of Directors of Environmental Health (CCDEH), universities with approved environmental health degree programs, and other entities.

The Survey

In the fall of 2000 all California REHSs were asked to participate in a survey regarding the REHS Program. The purpose of this survey was to provide the data that would form the foundation for the development of a multi-year strategic plan for the REHS Program. Over 30 percent of REHSs responded.

The survey was designed to cover general environmental health, the current REHS Program, and possible future services the REHS Program could provide. REHSs were asked to rate various statements on the survey according to agreement and importance. Each completed survey was tabulated, and the resulting percentages were plotted graphically. Additionally, respondents were asked to respond to an open-ended question as to how the environmental health specialist profession could be enhanced. The statistical results of the survey were published in booklet form and made available to REHSs. A copy of the survey is included in the appendices of this document.

Strategic Plan Stakeholder Team

In order to ensure that the final REHS strategic plan would reflect the critical issues facing the REHS Program, a stakeholder team was established. The members of the team were chosen to represent all entities that have relevance to the field of

environmental health including educators, employers, professional organizations, and REHS Program administrators. The participants included the Environmental Health Specialist Registration Committee and representatives from:

- California Conference of Directors of Environmental Health
- California Environmental Health Association
- California Conference of Local Health Officers
- California Environmental Protection Agency
- National Environmental Health Association
- California Department of Health Services
- Environmental Health Specialist Registration Committee
- University coordinators of approved environmental health degree programs
- Interested Parties

Stakeholder Team Meetings

The Strategic Plan Stakeholder Team met on July 30, 2002, September 3, 2002, and November 12, 2002 in Sacramento. During the meetings the team reviewed the findings from the REHS survey including the statistical results and the commentary responses. The survey results served as a basis for the focus group sessions and helped give the team insight into the relevant issues surrounding the REHS Program and the environmental health profession.

The team's task was first to reach consensus on the key issues currently facing the REHS Program. Once these key issues were established the team developed strategic initiatives or goals that would assist the REHS Program in addressing the most compelling issues. Ultimately the team identified key initiatives that defined the steps needed to ensure that REHS resources would address those issues.

First Meeting: July 30, 2002

During the first meeting the stakeholder team worked to identify issues facing the REHS Program and the field of environmental health. The stakeholders reviewed the survey results and compiled a list of key issues and focus areas.

The focus areas identified were:

- Education
- Recruitment
- Public Relations
- REHS Program Administration
- Professional Outreach

After the focus areas were identified, five teams were established to review the areas and develop key objectives.

Second Meeting: September 3, 2002

During the second meeting the five teams were asked to review the focus areas and to develop key objectives. Each team was asked to finalize a defining statement for each area that would describe the critical issues. These statements became the strategic initiatives or goals for the strategic plan framework.

The strategic initiatives identified as the most crucial to the REHS Program and the field of environmental health were:

1. Education: Develop educational strategies for environmental health protection.
2. Recruitment: Develop effective recruitment approaches for the environmental health profession.
3. Public Relations: Develop a public relations approach to environmental health protection.
4. REHS Program Administration: Develop administration programs for environmental health enhancement.
5. Professional Outreach: Develop forums and linkages with various organizations and agencies to promote awareness of environmental health protection.

Key objectives were then developed for each of the strategic initiatives in order to define the specific components necessary for implementation.

Third Meeting: November 12, 2002

During the third meeting the five teams affirmed the focus areas, strategic initiatives, and key objectives previously developed and discussed avenues for implementation.

Strategic Initiatives

During the strategic planning process the following five strategic initiatives were identified as the most crucial to the REHS Program and the field of environmental health:

1. Education: Develop educational strategies for environmental health protection.
2. Recruitment: Develop effective recruitment approaches for the environmental health profession.
3. Public Relations: Develop a public relations approach to environmental health protection.
4. REHS Program Administration: Develop administration programs for environmental health enhancement.
5. Professional Outreach: Develop forums and linkages with various organizations and agencies to promote awareness of environmental health protection.

The following is an outline of the strategic initiatives and the key objectives that describe the approaches to be taken in order to implement the REHS Program Strategic Plan.

1. EDUCATION: Develop educational strategies for environmental health protection.

- A. Registered Environmental Health Specialist (REHS) Program: Ensure that high caliber educational and training programs are available for environmental health professionals.
- B. Enhancing the Profession: Disseminate information regarding resources and services that increase the quality of current environmental health professionals.
- C. Continuing Education: Develop a mandatory continuing education program for REHSs in order to increase professional accountability and stature.

2. RECRUITMENT: Develop effective recruitment approaches for the environmental health profession.

Cultivate a workforce that is adequate in number, appropriately trained, and culturally competent by maximizing opportunities to encourage environmental health careers and staff retention in both the public and the private sectors.

3. PUBLIC RELATIONS: Develop a Public Relations approach to environmental health protection.

- A. Increase public awareness and support for environmental health in California.
- B. Increase the capacity of governmental agencies, educators, community members, and the private sector to effectively deliver environmental health programs.

4. REHS PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION: Develop administration programs for environmental health enhancement.

Ensure the quality and cost-effectiveness of the Registered Environmental Health Specialist Program.

5. PROFESSIONAL OUTREACH: Develop forums and linkages with various organizations and agencies to promote awareness of environmental health protection.

Leverage professional partnerships to promote environmental health.

Call to Action

This strategic plan has been developed with input from all Registered Environmental Health Specialists (REHS) with the survey and refined by the stakeholders representing various entities of REHSs at the stakeholder team meetings. The draft strategic plan was presented at a REHS Forum held at the California Environmental Health Association Annual Educational Symposium on April 4, 2003 in Napa, California.

The field of environmental health and the REHS Program are closely intertwined. This plan consists of specific components that call for actions from all of the stakeholder groups as well as individual REHSs. Working together we will turn the vision into a reality in our quest to protect and preserve the health of the people of California.

What can you do to help? There is no single answer to that question. Action and support is needed at many levels that include the California Department of Health Services, California Environmental Health Association, California Conference of Directors of Environmental Health, universities, policy makers, registrants, educators, and interested parties. As a registered professional we encourage you play an active role in the promotion of environmental health. Serve as an ambassador for the profession by volunteering to speak at schools, service organizations, or other community groups. Get involved. There are many ways you help. The strategic initiatives in this plan can be viewed as a gateway for action by all.

Appendices

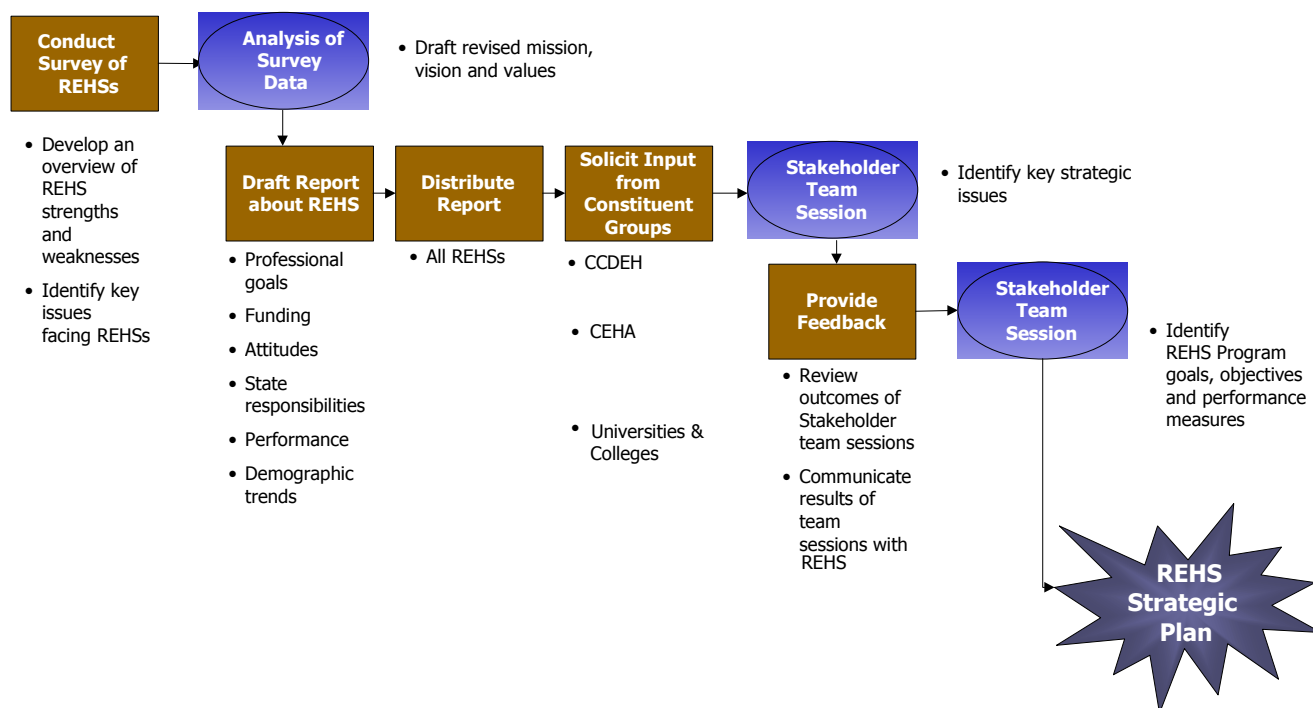
Strategic Plan Project Process
Survey

**Department of Health Services
Registered Environmental Health Specialist
Program
Strategic Planning Project**

June 5, 2002

REHS Strategic Planning Process

November 2000 → January 2001 → July 2002 → October 2002



The information from the recent REHS survey is being used as a key input in shaping the REHS program direction for the future. The information will be used as the basis for the identification of key issues, strategic initiatives and annual objectives in the 2002-2006 strategic plan. Over the next several months, the Stakeholder Team will meet and:

- Attempt to reach consensus on at least six key issues facing the REHS Program over the next five years.
- Develop strategic initiatives that will assist the REHS Program in addressing those key issues.
- Develop short-term objectives that will ensure that REHS resources are focused on addressing the key issues.
- Develop the preliminary strategic plan and produce a final document in 30-60 days.



**Survey of Professional Attitudes Among
Registered Environmental Health Specialists
In California**

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ABSTRACT

A survey of professional attitudes has been initiated by the Registered Environmental Health Specialist Program within the California Department of Health Services. It represents one of the largest surveys to date on attitudes within the environmental health profession and will be the basis for a multi-year strategic plan for the State program. The results have national ramifications, and other programs are encouraged to review this survey as the basis for further study.

The survey is divided into general environmental health issues as well as present and future services from the State program. All of the general issues and present services received scores of high agreement and high importance. However, scores for future program activities separated dramatically into high, medium, and low levels of importance and agreement.

The highest support for future program activities was associated with required registration within environmental health (EH) agencies, recruitment, and cost-based fee structures. A variety of services ranked in medium categories. The lowest levels of support were associated with registration fee increases, reciprocity for professions outside environmental health, and the current national registration exam. This paper discusses these results from the California perspective and invites review from a national audience.

Introduction

Numerous surveys have assessed attitudes within the environmental health (EH) profession (e.g., Lambeth 1986, Oleckno and Blacconiere 1987 and 1993, Saunders et al. 199). Some common themes in recent years include the needs for visibility of the EH profession, continuing education, and salary satisfaction (Evans 1995, Fabian 1996, Lawson and Ferng 1997). Both research and commentary continue to emphasize the value of recruitment, certification, and ethical standards (—, 1993, Wiant, 1997).

It is in this context that a survey was conducted of every active registered environmental health specialist (REHS) in the state of California. This article presents the results of that survey. Many previously studied themes can be found within this study. However, with a population of EH professionals as large as any state in the nation and larger than most nations, this survey represents one of the largest to date on attitudes within the environmental health profession. Moreover, California is well known for its ethnic and cultural diversity and is home to one of the most diverse groups of environmental health professionals in the world.

The distinction of this survey does not end with the size or diversity of the respondents, however. The project was initiated by the Environmental Health Specialist Registration Program within the California Department of Health Services (DHS). It will be the basis of a multi-year strategic plan for that State program. The project involves linkages among agencies, universities, and professional organizations. As such, it represents the use of linkages that continue to be encouraged within the literature (Adams et al. 2001).

In the process of analyzing the results, various reviewers soon became aware that the ramifications of this survey go well beyond any individual program. By analyzing general environmental health issues as well as present and future services from this state program, the results provide substantial support to previous surveys of this type. It also may add insight by providing the collective perspective of over a thousand registered environmental health specialists. Other state programs as well as corresponding national programs are encouraged to review this survey as the basis for further study.

The Survey Instrument

The survey instrument is shown in Figure 1. DHS developed this survey in November 2000 and mailed it to all of the 3,413 registrants on its database. The survey was designed to cover general environmental health areas, the current REHS Program, and possible future services the registration program could provide.

Respondents were asked to indicate levels of both importance and agreement for each of the 24 statements on the survey. This was accomplished by rating each statement from 1 to 5, with 5 representing the highest importance and agreement and 1 the lowest. Additionally, respondents were asked to respond to an open-ended question as to how the environmental health specialist profession could be enhanced. The results were tabulated by the end of February 2001.

Surveys were sent to the entire population of registered EH professionals and not merely to a sample of that population. The total of 1,051 surveys received have been completed in a manner that allowed them to be used in data analysis. This represents 30.8 percent of the surveys sent. The response rate is typical for surveys of this magnitude. Bolstered by follow-up presentations and discussions of these results with professional groups within the state, there appears to be substantial statistical power to the results.

The statements on the survey are categorized for analysis into three areas of focus. The first focus area is termed "General Environmental Health" and contains the initial three statements on the survey tool. The remaining 21 statements comprise the two focus areas labeled as "Current REHS Program" and "Future REHS Program" containing 9 and 12 statements respectively. This paper presents the analysis of the data gathered from the survey by each focus area as well as some of the comments from the open-ended responses.

Data Tabulation and Primary Analysis

Each completed survey has been tabulated using an Excel spreadsheet and analyzed by the Statistical Program for the Social Sciences (SPSS) program. Responses of 4 and 5 for each statement indicating the level of importance as well as the level of agreement are grouped together as are the responses of 1 and 2 for both importance and agreement. A percentage

is calculated for each using the total responses received for the category as the denominator. The resulting percents tabulated for each statement are plotted graphically with percent importance shown on the X-axis and percent agreement on the Y-axis. The graph is divided into quadrants and labeled as follows:

Low/Low (bottom left quadrant) represents low in importance and low in agreement, *Low/High* (top left quadrant) represents low in importance and high in agreement, *High/Low* (bottom right quadrant) represents high in importance and low in agreement, and *High/High* (top right quadrant) represents high in importance and high in agreement within the statement.

General Environmental Health

Statements in this section represent the highest percentage of agreement and importance for the entire survey. Responses to all three statements easily fall into the *High/High* quadrant. The data are displayed in Figure 2 and serve as a useful comparison for the remainder of the questionnaire. The three statements placing highest on the survey are as follows:

Statement 1: *The field of environmental health (EH) protects and preserves the public's health and the environment.*

Statement 2: *The Registered Environmental Health Specialist (REHS) plays a major role in the protection of human health and the preservation of the environment.*

Statement 3: *The workload in the field of EH necessitates that the EH staff has a strong science background.*

The percentage of responses to the first statement circling either a 4 or 5 for importance and agreement is 92 percent and 90 percent, respectively. This statement is the only one on the survey that has the percentage response to both importance and agreement scoring at the 90 percent or higher level. This indicates that the respondents feel strongly about their profession. As indicated by the responses to the second and third statements on the survey, the respondents likewise feel strongly about the role the REHS plays in protection of public health and the environment and the fact that a strong science background is necessary to carry out this work.

Current REHS Program

The second series of statements focuses on the current operations of the REHS Program. The results are shown in Figure 3. While all the activities are highly ranked, these statements can be separated into three tiers based on the natural breaks of the data that reflect the highest, medium, and lowest ranked activities.

Current Program: Highest Ranked Activities

Statements 5, 12, 13, and 17 have received the highest percentage responses for this focus area. These statements are presented in their measured order of scoring for agreement as follows:

Statement 5: *The administration of the registration exam is an important service that the REHS Program provides.*

Statements number 5 and 13 both have received the same score of 81 percent for importance and 84 percent for agreement. The examination process has been a key component of the registration process in California since 1947. The original registration legislation passed in 1945 “grandfathered” those who were working in the profession or had passed a civil service exam for several of the job classifications then used for the profession. Following that initial year of the registration program, an examination has been the final step to becoming registered. Therefore, it is understandable that those completing the survey would hold this as one of the high-ranking statements for the activities currently conducted by the program.

Statement 13: *REHSs who have committed unethical or unprofessional acts should have their EHS registration suspended or revoked.*

Truly recognized professions have a disciplinary process as a component of the activities of the licensing body. The registration act was amended in 1983 to allow DHS to deny, suspend, refuse to renew, or revoke a registration certificate for acts of deceit, misrepresentation, violation of contract, fraud, negligence, professional incompetence, or unethical practice (California Health and Safety Code, 1995). California DHS has used this authority to take disciplinary actions that have resulted in the revocation of registration certificates of environmental health specialists. It is understandable that the

respondents to this questionnaire give this statement its high rating because they recognize the importance of discipline to the profession.

Statement 17: *The evaluation of university EH curriculum and degree programs is an important function of the REHS Program.*

Statement 17 has received an equally high rating along with statements 5 and 13 for this focus area. The rating of 83 for percent importance received by Statement 17 is the highest for the focus area on the current REHS Program. There are five universities in California that offer an environmental health degree. California State University, San Bernardino offers an EH bachelor's degree. The University of California, Los Angeles and Loma Linda University both offer only a master's degree in EH. California State University, Fresno and California State University, Northridge each offer both bachelor's and master's degrees in EH.

In order to ensure that EH degree programs continue to meet the requirements of the Registration Act (California Health and Safety Code 106600-106735), it is imperative that these university programs be evaluated on a regular basis. The Environmental Health Specialist Registration Committee (EHSRC) plans to review all five existing university EH programs over the next two years. University site visitations will be conducted by both program staff and members of the EHSRC. The REHS Program will also encourage other institutions to consider offering EH degree programs. An alternative option would be to have the universities list in their catalogs courses within existing science degrees that would satisfy the educational components for EHS registration.

Statement 12: *The investigation of complaints regarding REHSs accused of unethical behavior or unprofessional acts is an important service that the REHS Program provides.*

Also scoring high in this focus area is Statement 12 that has received a score of 77 for both percent importance and agreement. As with Statement 13 described above, Statement 12 is an important component of the disciplinary process for the profession. It follows that Statement 12 would also score in the *High/High* quadrant. DHS has aggressively investigated all complaints received regarding unethical practices or unprofessional acts alleged to have been undertaken by REHSs. The results of these investigations are brought before the EHSRC for their review and recommendation for action. Ironically, for those REHSs accused of unethical behavior or unprofessional acts, the investigation can be a "double-edged sword." The investigation is conducted to gather evidence documenting whether improprieties were undertaken which is important

information for the disciplinary process. Equally important, however, is the fact that the investigation can serve to ascertain that no improper activities have taken place and thus can exonerate the accused REHS.

Current Program: Medium Ranked Activities

As can be seen on Figure 3, Statements 4 and 10 represent this medium tier of responses for the Current Program focus area with results being found near the mid-point of the *High/High* quadrant. The two statements are as follows:

Statement 4: *The primary responsibility of the REHS Program is to review applications, transcripts and training records to ensure that all applicants meet the minimum requirements prescribed by law.*

Statement 10: *The maintenance of the current REHS database is an important function of the REHS Program.*

Both of these statements pertain to program activities critical to the registration process. The score for Statement 4 is 75 percent importance and 74 percent agreement; Statement 10 is 71 percent and 76 percent respectively. Survey respondents are aware of these activities, having experienced them as part of their registration process. Currently the application review and testing process encompasses approximately 87 percent of the REHS Program staff resources.

Current Program: Lowest Ranked Activities

The final three statements for the Current REHS Program all have scored in the lower third of the *High/High* quadrant. Although they are all in the highest quadrant, the scores received for percent importance and percent agreement are not as high as the previous six already discussed for this focus area. The lowest ranking Current Program statements are as follows:

Statement 15: *The maintenance of the REHS web site is an important function of the REHS Program.*

The response to statement 15 is 57 percent for importance and 63 percent for agreement. The REHS web site has only been operational for a few months. Most users of the web site are newly registered individuals or those going through the

registration process. As the web site is expanded, it is anticipated that more REHSs will use it and its importance as a tool for the profession will grow.

Statement 6: *The use of a professional testing company to develop and prepare the REHS exam helps ensure that the registration exam is timely and covers the broad scope of EH in California.*

The REHS Program uses a professional testing company to develop and prepare the REHS examination. This service helps ensure that the exam is timely and that it covers the broad scope of environmental health practice existing within California today. The Cooperative Personnel Services (CPS) exam process currently in use in California draws from a bank of questions so that examinations are not repeated. New questions are developed regularly by item writers from within the profession and added to the bank of questions. This process keeps the exam up-to-date with current practices and developments within the environmental health field.

Prior to contracting with CPS in order to develop and prepare the REHS examination, the REHS Program contracted with the National Environmental Health Association (NEHA) and their subcontractor for these services. The California REHS Program administers the exam more frequently than most other jurisdictions within the country and, as a result, needs the examination questions to be changed routinely. The decision to use a different testing company was not an easy one, given the longstanding relationship between California REHSs and NEHA. However, the NEHA examination process at that time did not change the questions for the examination at a frequency sufficient to satisfy the particular needs of the California REHS Program. Using the same NEHA exam repeatedly resulted in a steady increase of the California test scores as questions became generally known by the examinees prior to the exam.

Reflecting the change to a different testing company, Statement 6 placed in the *High/High* quadrant with 57 percent for importance and 60 percent for agreement. Note, however, that responses to Statement 8 discussed under Future REHS Program suggest significant interest in a national registration program. Clearly, concerns for the exam itself do not extend to the overall concept of national registration.

Statement 9: *The issuance of REHS renewal cards is an important function of the REHS Program.*

The response of 50 percent importance and 53 percent agreement places Statement 9 at the cutoff for the importance factor for the *High/High* quadrant. A mechanism must be available to allow REHSs to provide validation of their current registration

to employers, and this has been accomplished over the years by issuing the registration card. New technology such as providing a list of currently registered individuals on the REHS Program's web site or sending a letter of verification to employers may need to be considered in lieu of issuing the cards.

Future REHS Program

The results of the Future REHS Program statements are presented in Figure 4. Using the same strategy of separating activities by highest, medium, and lowest ranked activities, statements in the Future REHS Program category can also be separated into three tiers. Unlike the previous sections, however, the items relating to possible future activities of the REHS Program track a wide range across the grid. Stretching from the *High/High* quadrant to the *Low/Low*, these items present a spectrum of possible directions the profession might follow. These survey results help to quantify the possible future REHS Program activities about which REHSs feel strongly and those which have relatively little value to them.

Future Program: Highest Ranked Activities

While none of the items listed under Future REHS Program reach the high levels found with the General EH category, three stand out as the highest of the Future category and are even higher than the three lowest or third tier of the Current REHS Program category. The top Future REHS Program items are:

Statement 18: All professional staff working for local EH agencies should be required to be registered as environmental health specialists.

This statement addresses a situation that has become an issue in recent years in some EH agencies. This survey indicates that REHSs give high importance to the concept that all professional staff working in EH agencies should be REHSs as evidenced by the 75 percent importance and 74 percent agreement totals. The rise in the past decade of hazardous materials sections in which inspectors may or may not be REHSs has created a composition within some EH agencies which previously did not exist. Many respondents of the survey commented that hazardous materials employees are often paid as much or more than REHSs, thus leading some to feel that professional registration as an environmental health specialist has been devalued.

Another concern expressed in the comment section of the survey is the use of technical EH staff who perform inspections and other traditional REHS duties, yet who have not met even the minimum educational requirements to qualify as an environmental health specialist trainee. While it is possible that technicians could assist local agencies in providing an increased level of customer service, the concern is that traditional REHS duties will be increasingly relegated to non-REHS staff, once again devaluing the profession.

Statement 16: The recruitment of new individuals to the profession is an important function of the REHS program.

Many local agencies in California have been affected by a strong job market that has increased the difficulty of filling vacant positions. The high placement of Statement 16 at 70 percent for both importance and agreement indicates that respondents would like the REHS Program to develop a more aggressive leadership role in recruiting new individuals into the profession. This is an area in which both organizations and individuals can participate by attending job fairs, high school and college career days, and even classrooms of school-age children in order to encourage young people to enter the profession as well as to develop an awareness for the field of EH. An aggressive advertising campaign is also a possibility. One of the prevalent comments by respondents in the survey is that the public needs to become more aware of the requirements, roles, and responsibilities of REHSs.

Statement 23: Fees paid for the EHS registration application and examination should reflect the actual cost of those services.

Currently the evaluation of applications and the administration of examinations consume approximately 87% of the total time for the full-time program administrator and the half-time clerical position allotted to the program. Clearly, this does not leave sufficient time for other program responsibilities. Statement 23 also places in the *High/High* quadrant at 63 percent importance and 67 percent agreement, indicating that REHSs believe that the fees for the applications and examinations should more closely reflect the actual program costs. Currently the California Conference of Directors of Environmental Health (CCDEH) is sponsoring legislation to increase the fees for the applications and examinations.

Future Program: Medium Ranked Activities

Many of the items categorized as Future REHS Program activities cluster around the 50-50 range indicating that REHSs are fairly evenly divided in their opinions about these possible future activities of the REHS Program. These statements include:

Statement 8: *The California REHS program should work with the California Environmental Health Association (CEHA) and [the National Environmental Health Association] NEHA to develop a national registration program.*

In this middle tier for the Future REHS Program category, Statement 8 places the highest with 59 percent for both importance and agreement. Even though it is not as high as those in the highest level Future REHS Program, it does indicate an interest of REHSs to work with NEHA toward developing a national registration. Note, however, that the very lowest item on the survey, and the item REHSs feel most strongly against, is using the current NEHA examination.

Statement 14: *The REHS program should publish the names of those who have had their registration suspended or revoked due to unethical behavior or unprofessional acts.*

Fifty-five percent of the respondents feel this concept is important, and 53 percent agree with it. Some comments from the survey indicate that it would be especially important to make the names of those people who have had their registrations suspended or revoked due to unethical behavior or unprofessional acts available to environmental health directors for hiring purposes.

Statement 22: *An annual update of the REHS program fund should be publicized.*

Publicizing an update of the REHS Fund as described in Statement 22 rates a 56 percent degree of importance but less with the agreement side at 48 percent. The REHS Fund currently is published as part of the Governor's budget on an annual basis.

Statement 21: *Continuing education units should be a requirement for maintaining EHS registration in California.*

The item that generates the largest written comment response is continuing education with comments heavily in favor of making continuing education units (CEUs) a requirement for registration renewal. However, the survey responses for Statement 21 are almost evenly divided with 51 percent for both importance and agreement. After extensive discussion and analysis, there appears to be no disagreement that training is imperative for REHSs to keep abreast of the ever changing developments in EH. The uncertainty lies in the details: who will pay for the CEUs, will time be compensated, will the courses be available in rural areas, who will ensure the quality of the acceptable courses, is there a sufficient quantity of quality courses available, will trainings provided by local agencies be approved, how will REHSs living out of state have access to training, who will keep track of the training, will credit be given to the trainer for trainings presented, and will incentives be available for master's and doctoral degrees?

Upon further statistical analysis of the results it is important to note that respondents rate highly the first two items of the survey which deal with the profession in general regardless of whether or not they favor continuing education. The analysis shows no significant correlation between how respondents feel about their profession and how they feel about continuing education. In other words, REHSs can feel favorably about the profession in general but have divergent views about continuing education.

However, the analysis also reveals that there are correlations to be drawn between views on continuing education and other items on the survey. Those who rate continuing education highly also rate highly item #3, a strong science background is needed, and item #17, the review of university degree programs is important. These statistics support the conclusion that those who are in favor of continuing education also value the education process in general.

Continuing education for REHSs has been an issue in California for several years. CEUs are required for many other established professions including teaching and nursing. If the concept of CEUs is to become a reality, we must all work together to iron out these details so that stronger support for CEUs can be generated. The common ground for these discussions is the strong overall support for the EH profession. The more challenging aspects are in addressing the details.

Statement 19: *California should offer new specialty registration or certification programs in areas such as sewage disposal, hazardous materials, water systems, cross connections, food standardization, solid waste, medical waste, recreational health, etc.*

Because of the diversity in the areas of expertise the field of EH requires, one of the objectives of the survey is to see how REHSs feel about the possible creation of new certifications which would be supplemental to the REHS certificate such as sewage disposal, hazardous materials, food, and others. Statement 19 is also fairly evenly divided at 49 percent importance and 52 percent agreement, offering no clear mandate in favor but also not demonstrating strong opposition to the concept.

Statement 11: *The REHS program should publish the names of those individuals registered as environmental health specialists (EHS) in California.*

In this second tier of the Future REHS Program, Statement 11 has the lowest agreement with 42 percent but has 50 percent importance to publish the names of REHSs. Because of the nature of a state registration, the names of REHSs are public information. However, this survey does not demonstrate a clear mandate to publish the names of REHSs.

Future Program: Lowest Ranked Activities

All three of the statements that rank in this third tier of the Future EH category fall into the *Low/Low* quadrant signifying that REHSs do not agree with the statements and feel that they hold little importance. The lowest ranked items of the survey are:

Statement 24: *I would support an increase in biennial REHS fees to enhance the EH profession.*

Statement 24 with 38 percent importance and 36 agreement indicates REHSs do not support an increase in the renewal fees. At this time, no increase in the REHS renewal fee has been planned.

Statement 20: *A provision should be written into the REHS program statute which would allow reciprocity for Registered Geologist, Professional Engineers, and Food and Drug Specialists just as Certified Dairy Inspectors currently receive by waiving REHS education and training requirements in order to allow them to take the REHS exam.*

Statement 20 is included on this survey in recognition of the fact that not all professionals working in EH agencies are REHSs. It is designed to determine if anyone feels that the REHS Program should reach out to those non-REHS professionals with an offer of reciprocity by waiving the education and training requirements and simply requiring that they pass the exam. The response was an overwhelming “No” with 39 percent importance and 32 percent agreement, indicating that REHSs recognize the uniqueness of their profession and the wide breadth of programs it covers.

Statement 7: Instead of a registration exam designed for California, the National Environmental Health Association (NEHA) exam should be used.

Even though Statement 8, which states that California should work with NEHA to develop a national registration, places considerably higher than Statement 7, REHSs definitely do not want to replace the California exam with the current NEHA exam. Statement 7,

with 30 percent importance and 25 percent agreement, is the lowest ranked item of the survey. All REHSs have had to successfully complete the registration exam. California does not offer reciprocity with any other state or agency. The results for this item are an indication that REHSs value the California examination.

Discussion

The survey has been designed to provide documentation to assist the California REHS Program in developing a multi-year strategic plan. Issues have been separated into the categories of General EH, Current REHS Program, and Future REHS Program and further separated into highest, medium, and lowest tiers. Results have been plotted onto graphs and divided into four quadrants based on levels of importance and agreement.

The comment section of the survey generated a wide array of ideas including some new issues not addressed by the actual survey statements. The survey comments covered such topics as:

- developing continuing education,
- requiring that only REHSs be employed for professional duties in EH agencies,
- increasing public awareness of REHS’s knowledge level and responsibilities,
- encouraging more universities to offer EH degree programs,

- increasing the cooperation of industry and private companies toward employing REHSs,
- providing an EH information central clearinghouse and periodic newsletter,
- developing EH program standardization and oversight,
- promoting equitable salaries statewide which reflect the education and training required,
- developing specialty certifications,
- requiring additional educational requirements including courses in interpersonal skills, public speaking, environmental law, and professional ethics,
- increasing REHS workplace safety, and
- developing national collaboration.

Each of these concepts deserves recognition and discussion in order to develop the full potential of each item.

A plethora of information has been collected from the survey. Accordingly, the California REHS Program will develop its multi-year strategic plan based on the documentation provided by this survey. As other issues emerge concerning attitudes within the profession, this database will serve as valuable support for the challenges ahead. Nevertheless, the future direction of the REHS profession will continue to be a collaborative effort of all interested organizations, agencies, businesses, and individuals. Together, we will prioritize the most compelling issues, develop possible solutions, and bring to fruition those ideas that will enhance the environmental health profession.

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Figure 1

The Survey Instrument

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES

REGISTERED ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH SPECIALIST PROGRAM

SURVEY

For each statement indicate your relative degree of agreement and the statement's relative degree of importance by rating each from 1 to 5 with 5 the highest agreement and importance and 1 the lowest.

Agreement

Lowest Highest

Importance

Lowest Highest

- | | | |
|-----------|---|-----------|
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 1. The field of environmental health (EH) protects and preserves the public's health and the environment. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 2. The Registered Environmental Health Specialist (REHS) plays a major role in the protection of human health and the preservation of environment. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 3. The workload in the field of EH necessitates that the EH staff has a strong science background. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 4. The primary responsibility of the REHS program is to review applications, transcripts, and training records to ensure that all applicants meet the minimum requirements prescribed by law. | 1 2 3 4 5 |

- | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 5. The administration of the registration exam is an important service that the REHS program provides. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6. The use of a professional testing company to develop and prepare the REHS exam helps ensure that the registration exam is timely and covers the broad scope of EH in California. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 7. Instead of a registration exam designed for California, the National Environmental Health Association (NEHA) exam should be used. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 8. The California REHS program should work with the California Environmental Health Association (CEHA) and NEHA to develop a national registration program. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 9. The issuance of REHS biennial renewal cards is <i>an important function of the REHS program.</i> | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 10. <i>The maintenance of a current REHS database is</i> an important function of the REHS program. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 11. The REHS program should publish the names of those individuals registered as environmental health specialists (EHS) in California. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

- | | | |
|-----------|--|-----------|
| 12. | The investigation of complaints regarding REHSs accused of unethical behavior or unprofessional acts is an important service that the REHS program provides. | |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 13. | REHSs who have committed unethical or unprofessional acts should have their EHS registration suspended or revoked. | |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 14. | The REHS program should publish the names of those who have had their registration suspended or revoked due to unethical behavior or unprofessional acts. | |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 15. | The maintenance of the REHS web site is an important function of the REHS program. | |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 16. | The recruitment of new individuals to the profession is an important function of the REHS program. | |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 17. | The evaluation of university EH curriculum and degree programs is an important function of the REHS program. | |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 18. | All professional staff working for local EH agencies should be required to be registered as environmental health specialists. | |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | | 1 2 3 4 5 |

- | | | |
|-----------|---|-----------|
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 19. California should offer new specialty registration or certification programs in areas such as sewage disposal, hazardous materials, water systems, cross connections, food standardization, solid waste, medical waste, recreational health, etc. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| | | |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 20. A provision should be written into the REHS program statute which would allow reciprocity for Registered Geologists, Professional Engineers, and Food and Drug Specialists just as Certified Dairy Inspectors currently receive by waiving REHS education and training requirements in order to allow them to take the REHS exam. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| | | |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 21. Continuing education units should be a requirement for maintaining EHS registration in California. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| | | |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 22. An annual update of the REHS program fund should be publicized. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| | | |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 23. Fees paid for the EHS registration application and examination should reflect the actual cost of those services. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| | | |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 24. I would support an increase in biennial REHS fees to enhance the EH profession. | 1 2 3 4 5 |

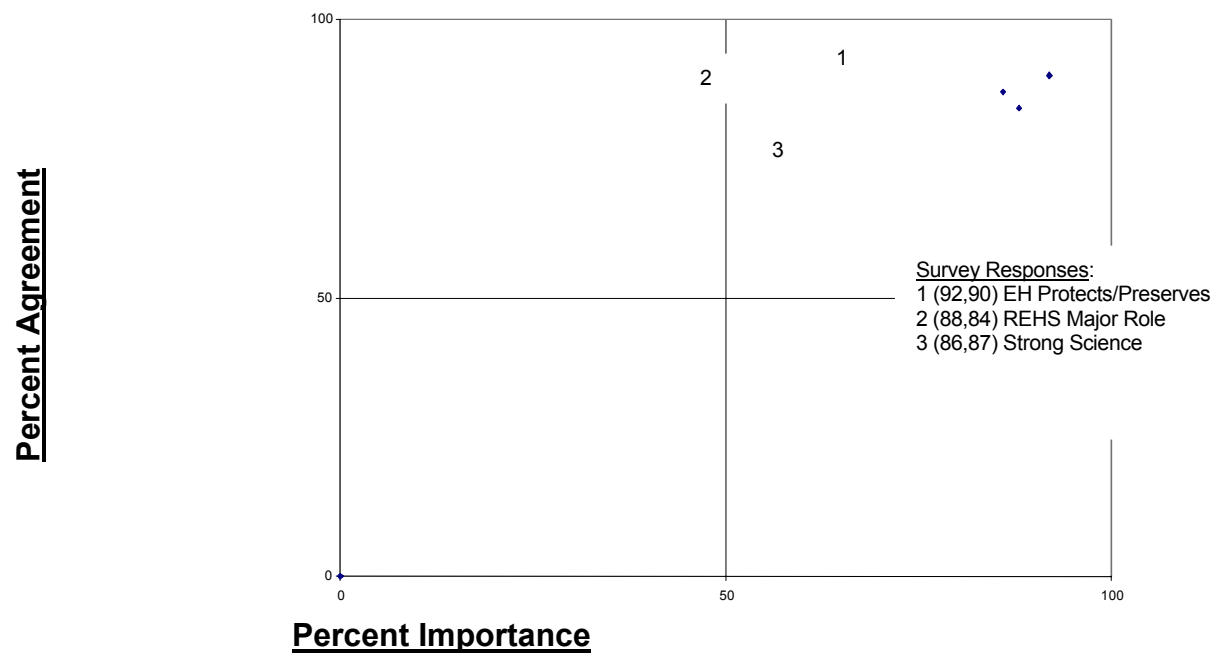
I feel the registered environmental health specialist profession can be enhanced by the following:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

List additional comments on back page.

Figure 2

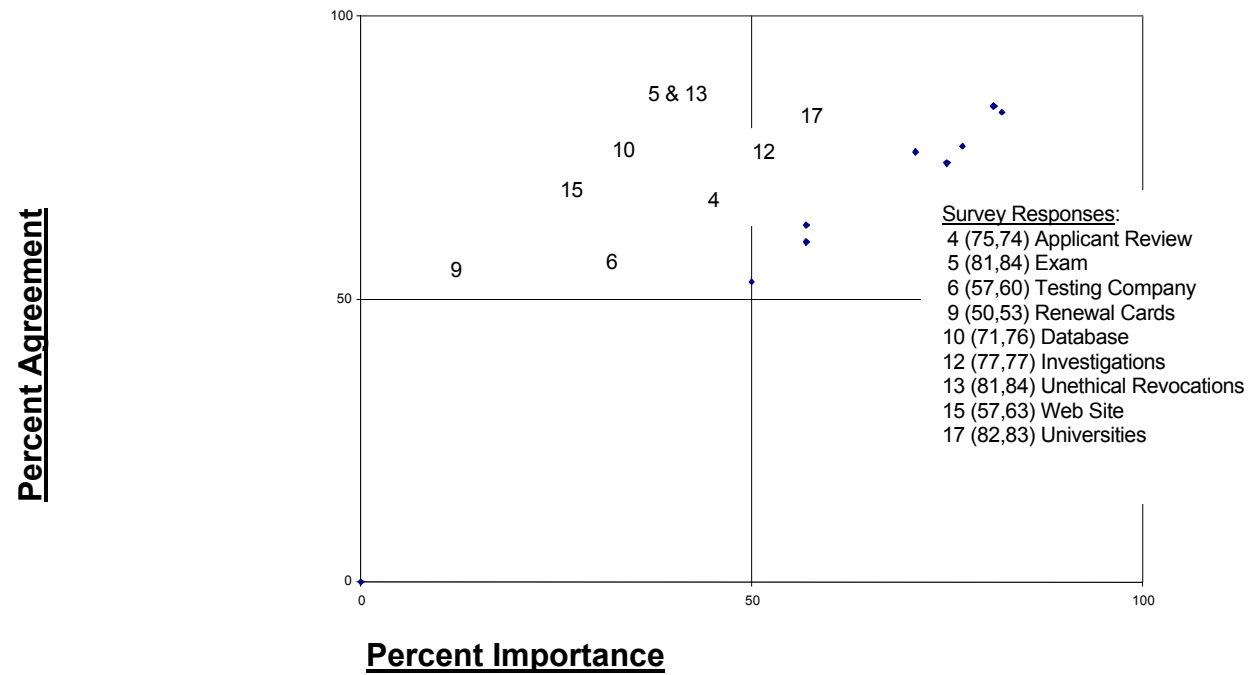
GENERAL ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH



Data Source: California Department of Health Services
Registered Environmental Health Specialist Program
April 2001

Figure 3

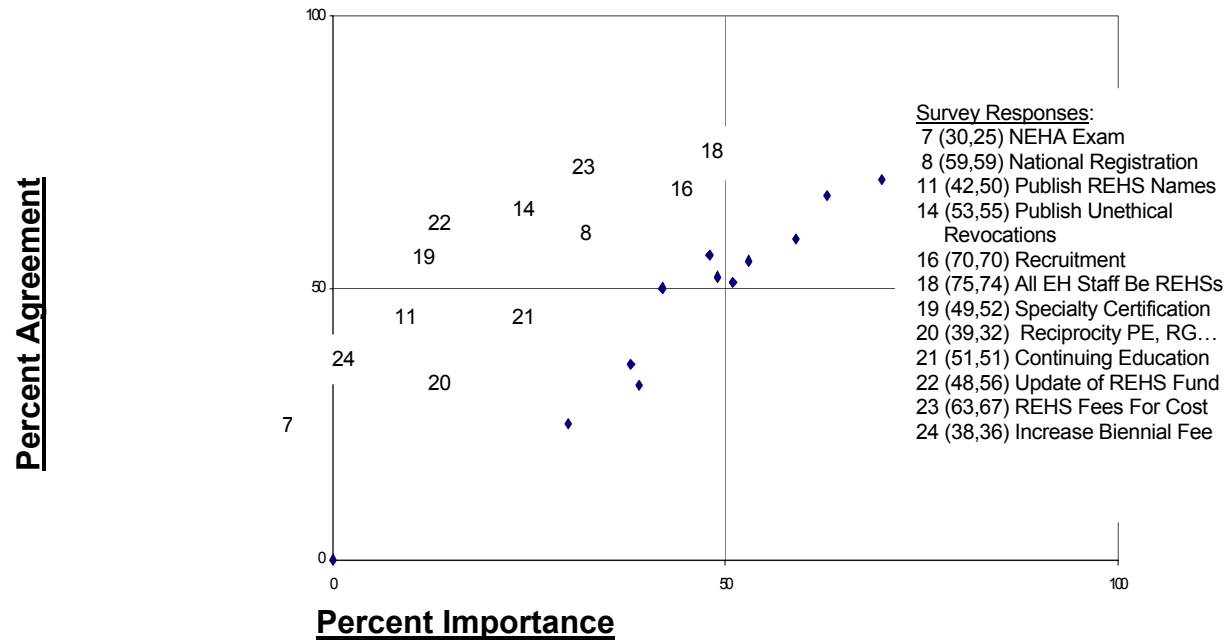
CURRENT REHS PROGRAM



Data Source: California Department of Health Services
Registered Environmental Health Specialist Program
April 2001

Figure 4

FUTURE REHS



Data Source: California Department of Health Services
Registered Environmental Health Specialist Program
April 2001

